NOT ENOUGH:

Summary Report and Recommendations of a National Consultation Into Strengthening Canadian Research of Inclusive Education

Faculty of Education, York University, Toronto
Roeher Institute, Toronto

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Introduction

Between November 2001 and March 2002, a national consultation was held on inclusive education in Canada and, more specifically, on interest in strengthening Canadian research examining inclusive educational reform. The consultation took place in five regional meetings in the following cities:

- Toronto – Ontario Region, November 10, 2001
- Winnipeg – Saskatchewan/Manitoba/NWT/ Nunavut Region, December 8, 2001
- Edmonton – British Columbia/Alberta/Yukon Region, February 2, 2002
- Halifax – Atlantic Provinces Region, February 16, 2002
- Montreal – Quebec Region, March 16, 2002

People with disabilities, educators from early childhood, elementary, secondary and post-secondary streams, and representatives from provincial/territorial departments of

education, disability advocacy and support groups, federations of educators, and research/service centres were invited to participate. In addition, some 165 organizations prepared written statements of their positions relative to inclusive education. Efforts were made to include organizations that favour inclusive education, and those known to favour retention of the special education model.

The present document presents summary findings of that community consultation process. The full research report is available separately from The Roeher Institute (Bunch, 2003).

The suggestion for a national consultation was advanced to Human Resources Development Canada on the belief that inclusive education is in keeping with current Canadian and international philosophy and purpose more closely than is a segregated special education system. This philosophy was expressed in 1996 by the Federal Task Force on Disability Issues:

> *The principle of inclusiveness implied in Canadian citizenship gives the Government of Canada a base for its approach to today's requirements [for persons with disabilities]. The federal government can – and should – promote the equality commitments contained in the national instruments that underpin full citizenship. It should also support programs and policies that help all Canadians participate effectively in the economic and social mainstream. Canadians have the right to expect inclusiveness, equality and the opportunity to achieve equal outcomes, no matter where they live.*[1]

Advocates of inclusion argue that learners with disabilities have the right to attend schools that are closest to their

homes, in settings that do not separate children according to an ideal of ability and competence. These are the same rights accorded to students who do not have disabilities.

While the research found considerable diversity and even confusion in terms of the definitions of inclusive education that consultation participants were using, a working definition likely to resonate broadly among advocates of inclusive education would include the following features:

- In all of their diversity or exceptionalities, all learners:
  - are welcomed and included in the regular classroom with their age peers in the neighbourhood school;
  - have the instructional and other supports they need in order to participate and to develop their human potential to the fullest extent possible;
  - are embedded in socially valuing relationships with a range of peers and with adults.

Benefits of inclusive education noted by various associations that took part in the consultations are as follows:

- Personal growth
- Stronger post-secondary learning
- Peer modeling
- Enhanced learning for peers of students with disabilities
- Increased learning for students with disabilities
- Greater expectations of teachers

- Development of independence
- Development of confidence
- Empowerment of typical peers
- Development of leadership in typical peers
- Preparation for future life
- Students learning from each other
- Development of friendships
- Access to regular curricula
- Everyone is welcome.

Supporters of special education dispute the notion that regular classrooms are the optimal environment for the learning of many students with disabilities. It is also feared by some that the rights of children without disabilities will be infringed upon by the presence of students with disabilities in the same classrooms. Provincial governments often sit on the sidelines, making minimal alterations to legislation governing students with disabilities and indulging in positive rhetoric, but cling to the traditional model.

The number of children and youth at the centre of this debate is substantial. Using data from the 1991 Statistics Canada Health and Activity Limitation Survey (HALS), it is widely estimated that 4.2 million Canadians are limited in everyday activities – approximately 13 percent of the population. Other sources have estimated the number of students with disabilities between 9 and 16 per cent. Jordan (2000) noted that 9.24 percent of the 194,000 students in Ontario in 1997 had some kind of disability. Applied to the

1999 figures for enrolment in Canadian elementary and secondary schools, the number of students with disabilities across Canada at those two levels reaches almost 500,000. Not counted in this estimate are those students with disabilities at the early childhood and post-secondary levels.

Whatever the number, it is certain that all Canadians with disabilities interact with the education system at one or more of the early childhood, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels. The education system is the single agency that interacts with nearly all Canadians from early childhood through adulthood, and interacts with them on a daily basis for 12 or more years. It is in the education system that all Canadians have the opportunity to come together, to know each other, to learn mutual respect, and to prepare for adult independence and fulfillment – the education system is the crucible in which citizenship is forged for children with and without disabilities.

Continuing use of the special education model has meant that only teachers who have special training, experience teaching students with disabilities, and who are adept at and willing to utilize special curricula are considered able to deal with the needs of learners with disabilities. The causes and results of this separation interact and intertwine, and may include:

- Status as second class learners within schools, and within the education system as a whole;
- Lack of familiarity with curricula studied by other Canadian learners;
- Generalized separation from peers without disabilities in the community;

- Minimal opportunity to advance to higher levels of education;
- Lower likelihood of opportunities for independence and rewarding employment as adults;
- Conditional recognition as participating citizens of Canada.

In Canada, educators in all provinces and territories are experimenting with inclusion, and some have been proactive in implementing it. Nevertheless, the special education model holds sway in most Canadian schools. While governments may make modest changes to legislation, the special education model is maintained. Rather than pushing for practice to influence policy, educators often adopt conservative positions and wait for governments to lead, and for research to shed light on new and promising practices. Certain community interest groups argue for continuance of the special education model, while others lobby for extension of the inclusive initiative. Across the country, parents and educators dispute educational options for individual children. Recourse to the courts is increasing.

Special Versus Inclusive Education – A Comparison

Advocacy for the inclusive model of education stems from a history of thought that has grown in response to the widespread, almost universal forced segregation of persons with disabilities. The philosophy of inclusion naturally extends to the domain of education. If persons with

disabilities are to be included and accepted as full citizens, as true members of society, it is only logical that this be practiced in one of the most important environments of socialization – the school. As Rioux (1999) states: "Inclusive education, like other issues of disability, is a barometer. It reflects the degree to which there has been fundamental movement toward a recognition of human rights." From this standpoint, the inability to educate students with disabilities in the same settings as students without disabilities signals not the impossibility of inclusion, but rather the shortcomings of a larger system which requires real development and change.

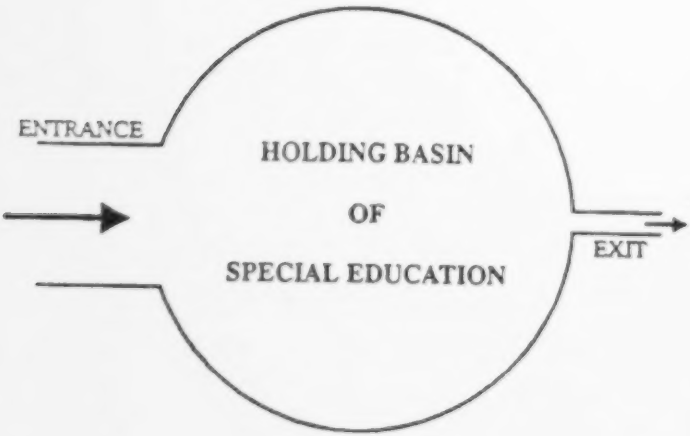
Inclusive education in Canada began in Hamilton, Ontario in the Hamilton-Wentworth Separate School Board in 1969. In fact, this school system was the first large system anywhere to opt for change from the special education model to an inclusive model. The Board accomplished this remarkable feat without fanfare or publicity and on the basis of a reasonable examination of the situation of students with disabilities. To this end, Hansen (2001, p.4) points out that "the integration of all children into the ordinary school system is a reasonable aim which, however, does not require literally revolutionary re-thinking of current attitudes and practices and provisions based on them."

Today there are no special schools, fulltime special classes or part-time special classes in the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic system. Every student, no matter what category or degree of challenge, is in a regular classroom. Hamilton-Wentworth is unusual, as well, in that educators led the change to inclusion. In most instances it is parental pressure or government mandate that initiates this change.

Other Canadian systems have followed the Hamilton-Wentworth example. The Yukon, Nunavut, and Northwest Territories, as well as the province of New Brunswick, have passed strong policies for inclusion. However, the majority of provinces continue to employ the special education model.

The special education model has grown from roots in the medical/psychological model. It is predicated on the belief that academic and social differences between students with and without disabilities are of such significance that separate educational provisions are required for many individuals. Students are clustered according to type and degree of disability (e.g. developmental delay, learning disabilities, giftedness, etc.), and are often set apart through special settings, special teachers, special pedagogical approaches, and formal identification and labeling. Though many students with disabilities may be educationally integrated in regular classrooms on a fulltime or part-time basis, their placement is liable to change to one of a range of alternate and increasingly segregated settings. There is always the chance that inability (for which the student is seen to be responsible) to maintain academic and/or social pace with students who do not have disabilities will lead to alternative placement. Once assigned a special education designation, it may be difficult for a student to overcome this label. Despite the fact that one of the major arguments in support of special education placement is that students will be strengthened by instruction, there, and able to return to the mainstream and keep up sufficiently with typical peers, Bunch (1997) has discussed the ease of entering the special education system and the difficulty experienced in exiting it, providing the "Eye of the Needle" exit model of special education, illustrated below.

"Eye of the Needle" Exit Model of Special Education



The inclusive education model challenges the cornerstones of the special education model, notably the beliefs that differences in academic and/or social achievement between students with and without disabilities are too disruptive to a regular educational setting; that special settings are more effective than regular classroom environments for students with disabilities; and that labeling is a key to appropriate service.

Advocates of inclusion argue that the right of persons with disabilities to be included in a regular classroom environment out-weighs the challenge to teachers inherent in such a situation. With the support of specially-trained resource teachers, regular classroom teachers should be able to work effectively with all students. Academic and social achievement has actually been found to be higher in regular education settings. It is also possible for students without

disabilities to benefit from being educated in the company of peers with disabilities.

The Value of Research

While support for a move from a special education model to an inclusive one has been swift in terms of parental response and acceptance by persons with disabilities, governments and educational bureaucracies have been slow to move.

Both the inclusive and special education models are argued for on the basis that one model serves students' educational needs more effectively than the other. The length of history of the special education model, the fact that most teachers and administrators were trained in special education, and the fact that the special education approach has been the most common approach has meant that abundant Canadian research has been done, and is being done, in universities and research institutes across Canada on aspects and effects of the special education model . The same cannot be said about practices and results of the inclusive education model. It has a short history where it does exist, and little or no history in the majority of school systems. A major factor in the continuing lack of knowledge around inclusive education in Canada, and in the hesitation of many to accept it, is the lack of clarifying and supportive Canadian research. No Canadian university and few Canadian researchers have focused on generalized reform toward inclusive education.

Few Canadian universities or colleges have focused on inclusive education in terms of research or preparing future teachers for the already changed reality of Canadian classrooms. There are no more than a handful of widely-separated Canadian researchers in the area, whereas many continue to study special education. As a result, Canadians are more familiar with and more dependent on research into inclusion from the United States than they are with Canadian resources. Additionally, as universities have failed to develop any focus on teaching or research around inclusive educational reform, no cadre of future researchers with interest and expertise in inclusive education is being developed.

Organizations that participated in the consultations were requested to make written submissions on various topics, and many took advantage of this opportunity. During each full-day meeting, participants were provided with a description of the context of research and inclusive education in Canada, and they heard from speakers presenting views of parents, persons with disabilities, advocacy organizations, First Nations groups, early childhood educators, and elementary, secondary, and post secondary educators. Afternoons were devoted to small group discussions of research needs, concerns, players, and other issues. Data derived from each of these information sources were analyzed, and themes categorized. These themes served as a basis for the following recommendations with regard to federal government action in inclusive education and strengthening of Canadian research in the area.

Recommendation #1:

Targeted research funds should be allocated to encourage the development of a Pan-Canadian agenda on inclusion as it relates to the Canadian education system from early childhood through post-secondary education and training.

Every organization participating in the national consultation, save one, supported the position that Canadian research into inclusive education requires strengthening. This recommendation is rooted in the belief that many Canadians with disabilities would benefit from education in regular community settings. Some organizations believed inclusion could extend to all learners with disabilities, while a lesser number believed there should be limits on inclusion. This recommendation is rooted in the belief that research on the Canadian educational situation is necessary in guiding and investigating inclusive education. Action is considered necessary as Canadian research into inclusive education is largely nonexistent. A significant number of participating organizations stated clearly that Canadian universities should take the lead in the strengthening of research. There was general agreement that the federal government, as the national government responsible for the welfare of all Canadians, was the appropriate agency to act in this area.

Since providing an education that matches the learning potential of Canadian students with disabilities will remain a challenge due to a number of factors, an endowment strategy is one suggestion, recommended to ensure that any research program established will be a long-term reality. Another suggestion could be the establishment of a research center with core funding for operating costs. The centre

would work to attract additional funding from its community and from organizations supporting research into various aspects of disability, education, and community inclusion.

Recommendation #2:

The federal government will work with the organizations that have participated in regional meetings as partners in determining which approach can best serve the development of a Pan-Canadian research agenda for inclusive education.

Those organizations attending each regional meeting demonstrated by their participation an interest in strengthening Canadian research around inclusive education, and in ensuring that the mandate of any research agenda will serve the needs of persons with disabilities and their families. Participating organizations held definite opinions about the design of research/service sites, the types of research to be undertaken, and who should be partners in research activities. In many ways, it is the members of these associations who are the consumers of inclusive education.

Recommendation #3:

Research programs will be developed in both the English and the French university systems.

Movement toward inclusive education is apparent in both English and French speaking areas of Canada. In the interest of Canadians with disabilities in both language

communities, research into inclusive education should be strengthened in both. Note should be taken that large French speaking communities reside outside Quebec, and that Quebec itself has large Francophone and Anglophone populations and universities.

Recommendation #4:

> ***Researchers will be linked in a collaborative network to ensure that a variety of players participate in research, that resources are used well, that potential for both national and inter-provincial research studies are facilitated, and that dissemination of research findings is facilitated.***

Participants emphasized that collaboration was to be a required characteristic of any inclusive education research initiative taken in Canada. The philosophy of inclusion rests heavily on the value of people working together toward a beneficial end. The experience of participants was that university researchers often did not consult widely when designing studies, and that research findings were not well disseminated among community groups. Participants also believed that Canadian research presently available too often has a very narrow geographic focus. Canada is an immense nation, elementary and secondary education are provincial responsibilities, and school systems and universities/colleges are independent organizations with individual needs and interests. However, the move toward inclusive education is national in scope, and what is researched in one part of Canada may have import to others. Therefore, studies which are national or inter-provincial in scope are of value.

Recommendation #5:

Research into the following areas should be targeted to be undertaken by Canadian researchers:

- Development of definitions of inclusion as understood under the inclusive education model, and integration as understood under the special education model
- Inclusion, human rights and social justice
- Attitudes of the many elements of Canadian society toward inclusive education
- How the inclusive education model and the special education model impact on the citizenship of Canadians with disabilities
- Models for inclusion at the early childhood, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels
- Professional preparation of regular classroom teachers, specialist teachers, administrators, and educational assistants for inclusive education
- Best practices in inclusive education
- Educational service delivery
- Funding of inclusive education
- Instructional strategies in inclusive education
- Development of supportive resources
- Effects of inclusive education experience on persons

with disabilities, their peers, their families, their teachers, their communities in both the short term and the long term

- Comparative effects of inclusive and special models of education
- Comparative costs of these models of education for Canadians with disabilities
- Application of inclusive education in rural and remote areas of Canada
- Involvement of First Nations, Inuit, and ethno-racially diverse groups in inclusive education.

Each of these general areas were mentioned by a number of participating organizations as central areas for research investigation. Each is regarded as of importance by significant groups of Canadians with interest in disability, education, and inclusion. Areas such as these could form the research activity component of a national research agenda around inclusive education.

Recommendation #6:

Universities applying for funds to support development of an inclusive education research program will be informed that the following should characterize research efforts:

- Research efforts should emphasize partnerships with persons with disabilities, parents, advocates, educators, professional educator organizations, and advocacy groups, among others, in a 'community of researchers' model

- Research efforts should develop a focus on policy and practice in inclusive education
- Both short-term and longitudinal research should be conducted into central questions of inclusive education
- Both quantitative and qualitative studies should be undertaken.
- Research and research results should be in forms accessible to the general community as well as to the academic community.

It was apparent from analysis of national consultation data that participating organizations, though desiring the strengthening of Canadian research into inclusive education, did not wish university researchers wholly to control the research process nor to determine what research should be undertaken. All wished that the community outside the universities be consulted on research possibilities and be involved in the actual research as active and real partners. They wished those being studied to have a say in how, when, where, and why they were studied. They were interested in studies which informed them, as well as educators and government.

Recommendation #7:

Universities applying for research funds will be informed that successful universities would be those:

- With affirmative action policies for persons with disabilities

- [illegible] existing commitment to research and research development in inclusive education
- [illegible] existing commitment to community partnerships
- [illegible] programs of undergraduate teacher preparation with strong elements of inclusive theory and practice
- [illegible] programs of graduate student study and research into inclusive education
- [illegible] supportive programs across a number of disciplines
- [illegible] commitment to strengthening face-to-face training programs around inclusion

Various Canadian universities have invested time, energy and funds in initiating research, development and teaching activities around inclusive education, both across the university and in various departments. They have established programs on which to build and thus will serve as strong platforms on which to create a powerful and capable network of researchers and research activities to meet Canadian needs.

Recommendation #1

In order to stimulate immediate research activities around inclusion in Canada, the federal government in collaboration with provincial territorial governments will explore and find ways to equitably fund research into

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

have not yet been established. Knowledge of the need for a new understanding of educational possibilities for persons with disabilities, and of the value of inclusive education has not been generalized. For instance, private foundations with interest in education were invited to participate in the national consultation. None attended. A stimulatory program would be of benefit, particularly in the immediate future.

Recommendation #10:

Preference will be given, all other considerations being equal among candidates, to graduate students with disabilities in awarding of the aforementioned scholarships.

This recommendation is based on a number of facts. Almost all present researchers of disability, education, and inclusion are persons who do not have disabilities. In general, scholarships to persons with disabilities for the purpose of studying disability are few. There is growing interest in the communities associated with disability that persons with disabilities take an active role in research. A signal from the federal government in this area would be noticed by many others.

Recommendation #11:

A national centre for dissemination of research findings from Canada and other nations will be established immediately with the purpose of ensuring that all Canadian universities, colleges, school systems, research

institutes in the area of disability, provincial/territorial departments of education, advocacy organizations, and associations of persons with disabilities are kept informed of research into inclusive education.

This recommendation signals the need for immediate action in informing Canadians from many walks of life of research into disability, education, and inclusion. At present, there is no Canadian centre for dissemination of such material. It was apparent throughout the national consultation that the great majority of participants felt a need for such information to guide them in their endeavours, but were frustrated at its lack of availability. Adding to the frustration was the fact that available research findings are often written above the level of the ordinary layperson. Information could not be accessed as there was no vehicle for dissemination, and when accessed, it was in a form which challenged understanding. As being informed is the first step in understanding the need for and direction of change, it seems imperative that a centre for dissemination of information in Canada be established, and that the centre have adequate resources in plain English and French.

Conclusion

Inclusive education is a contested issue. Both the inclusive and special education models have advocates who hold that their model serves students' educational needs more effectively than the other. While some provinces and territories in Canada have legislation and policy strongly in support of inclusive education, most jurisdictions also allow special education.

Inclusive education has a short history and little or no history in most Canadian school systems. A major factor in the continuing lack of knowledge around inclusive education in Canada, and in the hesitation of many to accept it, is the lack of clarifying and supportive Canadian research. No cadre of future researchers with interest and expertise in inclusive education is being systematically developed.

The following measures would help close the research and knowledge gaps:

- Targeted research funding to spur the development of a Pan-Canadian agenda on inclusion in education from early childhood through post-secondary education and training.
- A partnership approach that would involve the federal government and other stakeholders in mapping out the research agenda.
- Development of research programs on inclusive education in both the English and French university systems.
- Partnerships between university-based researchers and community organizations, linked across provinces and territories.
- Research in selected subject areas that are detailed in this document.
- Clear criteria to guide the allocation of financial resources for the research.

- An up-front investment, equitably shared by federal and provincial/territorial governments, to stimulate the development of a research network over the longer term.
- Graduate-level scholarships for research in disability, education and inclusion
- Measures to ensure that qualified graduate students with disabilities have preferred access to research scholarships where other qualifications are equal.
- Creation of a national centre for broad dissemination of research findings from Canada and other nations.

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Endnotes

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